

HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

General

While humanitarian access improves following the April 2002 ceasefire agreement, logistical constraints continue (April 2002)

- Since April 2002, the circulation of goods and people has increased greatly throughout the country
- However, continuing logistical constraints include the poor condition of roads and airstrips, broken bridges and land mines
- The governor of Malanje province, whom aid workers had accused of obstructionism, is to be replaced

"Following the signing of the 4 April Memorandum of Understanding, the circulation of goods and people increased markedly throughout the country. Few security incidents were reported and security assessments carried out during the Rapid Assessment of Critical Needs (RACN) expanded access to vulnerable populations throughout the country. Several important road corridors were cleared for humanitarian operations during the RACN, including Lobito-Sumbe-Luanda, Sumbe-Gabela-Quibala, Gabela-Waku Kungo, Caxito-Quibaxe, Uíge-Buengas, Uíge-Negage-Ndalatando, Luanda-Ndalatando-Malanje, Malanje-Calandula, Saurimo-Alto Chicapa, Luena-Dala, Menongue-Mavinga, Menongue-Savate, Lubango-Chipindo, Lubango-Huambo, Huambo-Katchiungo, Huambo-Bailundo, Huambo-Alto Hama-Balombo-Benguela, Kuito-Andulo, and Kuito-Chitembo. Several of these corridors had been closed for an extended period of time and their opening will facilitate the work of humanitarian operations, decrease air passenger and cargo expenses and increase the circulation of persons and commercial trade among provinces.

Despite improved access, the following logistical constraints hampered humanitarian operations during April:

In Benguela Province, the bridge over the Cavaco River collapsed due to heavy rains on 30 March, seriously affecting the movement of humanitarian personnel and goods between Lobito and Benguela. Partners were able to use the railway to transport assistance to flood-affected populations in Benguela and Dombe Grande. Heavy rains also destroyed a bridge on the road between Bocoio and Balombo on 20 April, delaying assistance to approximately 20,000 IDPs.

In Bié Province, the Kuito airport was closed to cargo flights on 26 April. Several closure periods are planned until the end of August.

In Huíla Province, road access between Lubango and Caluquembe, where a large IDP population is present, was temporarily suspended due to the poor condition of a bridge over the Cusse River.

In Malanje Province, fuel supplies for humanitarian operations continued to be insufficient and intermittent. De-mining activities were interrupted during one week due to lack of fuel.

In Uíge Province, a WFP passenger plane skidded into a patch of thick mud on the Maquela do Zombo airstrip. Provincial authorities and humanitarian partners worked together to repair the airstrip, avoiding the indefinite closure of the airstrip.

Mine surveys are still required in many areas before humanitarian operations can begin." (UN OCHA, 30 April 2002)

"Meanwhile, ahead of a donor conference to provide assistance for Angola's recovery, President Jose Eduardo dos Santos told a party rally that he was replacing Flavio Fernandes, the governor of Malanje province, who had been accused of obstructionism by aid workers.

[...]

... the pending replacement of Fernandes provides a glimmer of hope for the aid workers who leveled complaints against him, and Luis Paulinho dos Santos, governor of Bie province.

Earlier this year it was alleged they were not repairing air strips satisfactorily which was hampering aid deliveries, and were impounding aid workers' vehicles.

Erica Hazelaar, former programme manager for Oxfam in Malanje told IRIN that it was difficult to predict what impact a new governor would have but said: 'In past experiences, the governor wasn't really co-operative, maybe a little obstructionist. Not just to Oxfam but to other organisations too.'

Hazelaar said problems encountered were poor road and runway repairs, and poor support to the hospital which had no electricity and drugs. 'These are things that can be improved upon,' she said. (IRIN, 8 July 2002)

Humanitarian aid is severely hampered by insecurity and poor infrastructure (2002)

- Humanitarian aid reaches only 10-15 percent of the country in limited areas
- As many as 500,000 people living in inaccessible areas are estimated to be in need of assistance

"Humanitarian aid reaches approximately 10 to 15 percent of the country in limited zones in and around the major provincial towns where security can be guaranteed. In UNITA-held areas, humanitarian access is virtually nonexistent. Humanitarian workers face extremely difficult, and even dangerous, working conditions. Armed attacks, acts of banditry, and landmines are a constant risk. The lack of access is exacerbated by the fact that Angola's infrastructure is almost entirely destroyed by fighting, looting, lack of maintenance, and landmines." (HRW 5 March 2002)

"International agencies currently have access to 60 percent of the 272 locations where IDPs are concentrated and only 73 percent of reported displaced populations. The rest of the areas where IDPs are concentrated are inaccessible to international agencies.

As many as 500,000 people living in inaccessible areas are estimated to be in need of assistance. Of these, 280,000 are thought to be in critical distress.

Due to insecurity and logistical constraints, more than 60 percent of all humanitarian aid is transported by air.

The Angolan humanitarian operation is one of the most expensive in the world due to exorbitantly high transport costs.

Four airstrips are currently under repair, including the airstrip at Kuito. Delivery of assistance in all of these critical locations – Uige, Luena, Negage and Kuito, is severely hampered. Seventeen airstrips in total require repair. Although the Government has recently repaired a handful of bridges on the key surface route between Huambo and Kuito, hundreds more are damaged or destroyed. Eighteen priority surface routes require either upgrading or repair.

Insecurity is rampant along surface routes, limiting the safe passage of convoys. During 2001, more than 75 convoys were attacked.

At least seven provinces, accounting for 40 percent of the entire countryside, are heavily mined, preventing the free movement of people and goods." (UN OCHA 8 February 2002)

Displaced in Bié, cut off from international aid, are dying of hunger, according to local authorities (December 2001)

- Humanitarian situation in various parts of country, especially those inaccessible to international organisations, deteriorating with upsurge in military activity
- Local official reports that up to 80 people died from hunger and lack of medical care in Cuemba, Bié province, in the first two weeks of December 2001

"With a government offensive against UNITA in full swing, the humanitarian situation in some parts of Angola - particularly in areas to which aid organisations have no access - has been deteriorating. LUSA on Thursday quoted a local official as saying that nearly 80 people had died from hunger and a lack of medical care in Cuemba in Bie province in the first two weeks of December.

Cuemba, located about 160 km east of Kuito, lies outside areas targeted by international humanitarian agencies. With its bridges down and roads mined, the only aid reaching Cuemba has been ferried in by the Angolan air force, according to LUSA. Humanitarian, civic and church bodies have been appealing to the government to create safe corridors in areas like Cuemba for at least the past year so that much needed aid can be delivered to those affected by the war." (IRIN-SA 21 December 2001)

Plane accident in Kuito highlights constraints to delivery of humanitarian aid (November 2001)

- Cargo plane damaged and grounded after hitting pothole on the runway of Kuito airstrip while landing
- Runway's state of disrepair has hindered delivery of humanitarian aid for more than two years
- In absence of other functioning infrastructure, Kuito airstrip is essential for delivery of more than 80 percent of all relief aid to Bié province

"Humanitarian officials in Angola expect a damaged Boeing 727 plane to be removed from the Kuito airstrip in Bie province by the end of the week, without affecting the delivery of food aid to the needy.

The Boeing, delivering cargo to businesses in the province, was damaged and grounded when it hit a pothole on the runway while landing. No one was injured, but the accident once again highlighted the dismal state of the airstrip in the provincial capital. The runway's state of disrepair has hindered the delivery of humanitarian aid and, for more than two years, been a bone of contention between relief organisations and the provincial government, which is responsible for ensuring its maintenance.

World Food Programme (WFP) deputy head of air operations in Luanda, Jose Fernandez, told IRIN that WFP had decided a while ago to use smaller craft to transport food to the airport because the runway could not accommodate bigger planes. Fernandez said the distribution of food to the needy would not be affected by the accident because even though WFP had to suspend its flights to Kuito until the runway was cleared, there was enough food aid in the city to last for about two months.

The state of Kuito's airport, through which more than 80 percent of all relief aid reaches Bie, has made headlines before. While Bie governor Paulino dos Santos told IRIN in May that a private company contracted to the government was responsible for the repairs, work has been sporadic. Only 150 metres of the 2 km runway has so far been rehabilitated and there are fears that the rainy season, which normally lasts until April, could prevent planes from landing there altogether.

[...]

The [UN and US-led] delegation which visited Kuito also raised the condition of the road between Kuito and Camacupa, about 80 km away, which was opened earlier this year, granting humanitarian workers access to thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs) fleeing fighting between government and rebel UNITA troops. All aid to Camacupa has to be transported by road from Kuito. A bridge and a stretch of road in a state of disrepair near to Camacupa could cause the town to be cut off during the rainy season.

WFP Angola Representative, Ronald Sibanda, said during the visit that the ruined infrastructure could cause a 'logistical nightmare' during the rainy season. 'We are trying our best to pre-position stocks before the rains begin, but there is a limit to how much we can pre-position. It doesn't remove the need for improving the basic infrastructure, because this is a lifeline,' he said.

In another development, humanitarian officials confirmed to IRIN that the Angolan Armed Forces (FAA) had begun delivering emergency food supplies to certain areas in the province which were under FAA control but were inaccessible to humanitarian workers. As an initiative of the FAA, the deliveries fall under the authority of the presidency and not the provincial government. IRIN was unable to obtain information on the volume or precise locations of the deliveries." (IRIN 6 November 2001)

Issue of "humanitarian corridors" in Angola revisited by UN Security Council (October 2001)

- UNSC asked Angola's warring parties to permit access for humanitarian workers
- 500,000 Angolans in need of food and medicine cannot be reached
- UN may raise issue of "humanitarian corridors" with Angolan government by end of year

"The United Nations Security Council has asked Angola's warring parties to grant humanitarian workers access to at-risk communities, saying it is deeply concerned about humanitarian conditions in the country. UN statistics indicate at least 500,000 Angolans in desperate need of food and medicine cannot be reached.

Security Council President Richard Ryan said in a statement on Wednesday [18 October 2001] that the Council had received an extensive briefing from Ibrahim Gambari, the Secretary-General's special adviser on Africa, on the work of the United Nations Office in Angola (UNOA). 'Council members expressed deep concern about the humanitarian situation. They asked that access to the at-risk population be granted to humanitarian workers,' Ryan said.

The issue of getting to Angola's most vulnerable populations, who cannot access humanitarian assistance because of the ongoing civil war, was raised by the church and other civic bodies earlier this year, when they called on the government and UNITA to create conditions for the establishment of 'humanitarian corridors' in areas they control. Other international NGOs have also echoed the call. The UN has expressed support for the concept and could raise the issue with Angolan authorities, at least, by the end of the year, a source told IRIN.

However, UNITA spokesman Joffre Justino told IRIN that without a bilateral ceasefire, UNITA could not provide humanitarian workers with safety guarantees. He said it would be impossible since UNITA now operated as a guerrilla force and did not 'control' any part of the country. The responsibility for creating humanitarian corridors, he said, lay with the Angolan government. The Angolan military authorities, however, in spite of claiming to control 90 percent of the country, have had to reduce their security perimeters around many towns in recent months under increasing pressure from UNITA." (IRIN-SA 18 October 2001)

Humanitarian agencies targeted in May and June 2001

- Sixteen World Vision staff members missing following rebel attack in Kwanza Norte
- Two WFP planes deliberately attacked while delivering food to Kuito, Bié

Attack of World Vision staff in Kwanza Norte in May 2001:

"Sixteen World Vision staff members are missing after rebels Monday took over a northern Angola city more than 130 east of the capital city, Luanda. The rebel group known as UNITA, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola, captured the town of Golungo Alto in Kwanza Norte province. Four other World Vision staff reached the town of Ndalatando shortly after noon Monday, following a 27-mile trek.

The fighting forced the Christian humanitarian organization to suspend its \$1 million Golungo Alto program helping 60,000 people, including 9,700 from outlying areas displaced by fighting.

'We are concerned about our staff and are praying for their safety,' said Anne Mesopir, director of World Vision's work in Angola. 'We're also concerned about the people of Golungo Alto. We were due to distribute monthly food rations to more than 4,000 people today.'

World Vision is working with the United Nations and other aid agencies to establish a relief station for people displaced by this latest fighting. Ms. Mesopir has dispatched a truck to the area to transport staff as they are found, as well as women and children in need of assistance." (World Vision 21 May 2001)

Attack on WFP planes:

"The World Food Programme and the United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator, a.i. in Angola repudiate the second deliberate attack within the last week on two of its food aid aircraft.

A missile was fired on Friday at two WFP chartered cargo aircraft, 45 km from the central highlands city Kuito, capital of Bié Province. It exploded at some distance from the first Hercules airplane, but caused no damage.

The two aircraft, bearing 17 MTs of maize each, were forced to abort their humanitarian mission and return to the coastal airbase Catumbela.

WFP will temporarily suspend all cargo flights in Angola, pending a thorough investigation of the incident.

Failure to re-establish the food airlift into Kuito will result in dire consequences to at risk populations in the city and surrounding areas. With the highest proportion of internally displaced persons in the country and

record levels of malnutrition, Kuito has only five days of emergency food stocks to sustain a population of over 200,000 people.

The attack took place at approximately 1300 GMT. The aircraft, one of them painted white and clearly marked with WFP insignia on the side, were following a well-known flight route, and had the clearance of both Angolan air-traffic authorities and the military.

Pilots were careful to follow security procedures established to guard against such instances. WFP and the UN team are greatly relieved that there were no casualties or damage to the aircraft as a result of the attack." (WFP 15 June 2001)

Insecurity triggered international initiative to create humanitarian corridors in 1999

- U.N. agencies lack access to fourteen out of eighteen provinces (September 1999)
- The Government first turns down UN appeals to negotiate the creation of humanitarian corridors because it does not want to "legitimise" UNITA
- It later softens its position after attacks on aid workers attempting to administer polio vaccinations in the provinces

"The most pressing priority for U.N. agencies in 1999 is to get unhindered access for relief efforts. According to the U.N. by April 1999, 1.6 million people have been displaced by the conflict, including 680,000 in 1998. The U.N. agencies do not presently have access to fourteen out of eighteen provinces. Ramiro da Silva and Martin Griffiths, the deputy to the under-secretary-general for humanitarian affairs visited Luanda in March to have talks with the government on opening up humanitarian corridors and presented the government with a 'non-paper'-a formal document with no official status-on the issue. The government responded that it did not believe in any contact with UNITA as this would legitimize the rebels. On April 2 [1999] in London the World Food Program called upon the government and rebels to accept the creation of humanitarian corridors so that relief could be effectively distributed. The U.N. would also like to do a comprehensive humanitarian needs assessment in government and UNITA-controlled areas. However, on April 6 [1999] the Angolan government turned down this appeal saying the timing was not right and that the government would eventually open its own corridors. The urgency of safe humanitarian corridors was underscored on April 15 when six aid workers were killed in an ambush on a road south of Luanda between Lobito and Sumbe, when they were on their way to a meeting to discuss help for newly displaced people.

A second, similar attack occurred on June 12 [1999] when two humanitarian workers were killed and two injured near Barraca, Bengo province. The workers, of the NGO Instituto Portugues de Medicina Preventiva were ambushed by an armed group while they were carrying out a polio eradication campaign and driving in clearly identified vehicles. The attackers were reported to have taken some items and set fire to the vehicles. U.N. Under Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Sergio Vieira De Mello on June 16 [1999] issued a statement urging the Angolan government and UNITA rebels to take immediate measures to bring those responsible for the act to justice and to improve the security and protection for humanitarian workers. A further attack on an aid convoy occurred on July 20 [1999] between Lucala and Samba Caju, on the six hundred kilometer journey from Luanda to Uige. Many people were killed and about thirty vehicles destroyed, including a vehicle belonging to the Catholic aid agency Caritas International.

The government slightly softened its position in July over humanitarian assistance to areas controlled by UNITA. President dos Santos agreed to let the U.N. humanitarian assistance unit (UCAH) and the International Committee of the Red Cross contact UNITA about conducting a polio vaccination drive in rebel areas. On August 10 the government softened its position further and announced that it would

authorize the opening of 'humanitarian corridors' under the auspices of the ICRC to ease the transport of emergency aid to the war." (HRW 30 September 1999, chapter X, "Humanitarian Aid Corridors")

For more on the establishment of humanitarian corridors, see report by Anna Richardson entitled "Negotiating humanitarian access in Angola: 1990-2000" [\[External link\]](#).

Shooting down of UN planes underlines the level of insecurity in Angola in late 1998 and early 1999

- Two United Nations aircraft with a total of 15 passengers and 8 crew members respectively shot down on 26 December 1998 and 2 January 1999
- In response to these developments, the UN limited air operations in Angola to the most essential medical and casualty evacuations; it withdrew all personnel from the provinces

"The negative public atmosphere created by the Angola media campaign against the United Nations has been compounded by incidents of harassment and non-cooperation with MONUA in several areas of the country, including Luanda. In view of the increased security threat, MONUA, in close coordination with the Secretariat, continued to review the deployment of its teams and decided, in December 1998, to relocate all United Nations team sites to safer areas.

The exposure of United Nations personnel in Angola to grave security risks was demonstrated by the apparent shooting down near Huambo of two United Nations aircraft, with a total of 15 passengers and 8 crew members, on 26 December 1998 and 2 January 1999 respectively. Both aircraft, chartered by MONUA, went down in areas of active military operations. The two Angolan parties denied any responsibility for those incidents. Despite strong and repeated appeals by me, my Special Representative and the Security Council, UNITA and the Government initially showed no inclination to cooperate with MONUA in the search and rescue operations or to cease hostilities in the areas where the aircraft had gone down. Attempts to survey the sites by using United Nations aircraft were not successful, since neither party gave consent to such an operation. In the meantime, the Government presented to the press a purported deserter who claimed that he was aware of several survivors of the first crash. This statement was repeated by some government officials.

[...]

In response to these developments, the United Nations decided to limit its air operations in Angola to the most essential medical and casualty evacuations and to expedite the withdrawal of all its personnel to Luanda, as also requested by the Government. The deployment and rotation of United Nations personnel to the mission area has been stopped." (UNSC 17 January 1999, paras. 7,8,11)